

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 3533

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PBOR, MARR, LE
SUBJ: SITUATION IN LEBANON: CONVERSATION WITH PRIME
MINISTER HOSS

1. SUMMARY. SAW PRIME MINISTER HOSS JUNE 26 AND FOUND HIM RATHER DISPIRITED. HE COMPLAINED OF DETERIORATING HEALTH. HE DIDN'T HAVE ANYTHING PARTICULAR TO REQUEST OF US OR SUGGEST BUT DID CONFIRM WHAT BOUTROS AND SARKIS HAD SAID ABOUT READINESS OF GOL TO SEND TROOPS TO SOUTH. FOLLOWING ARE HIGHLIGHTS. END SUMMARY.

2. GENERAL. CALLED ON PRIME MINISTER AT MINISTRY OF NATIONAL ECONOMY MORNING JUNE 26 AND FOUND HIM IN SAME DEPRESSED MOOD AS OTHER LEBANESE OFFICIALS ON WHOM I HAVE CALLED IN PAST FEW DAYS. HOSS SAID CONTINUED STRESS WAS AFFECTING HIS HEALTH. HE WAS HAVING ATTACKS OF ASTHMA EVERY DAY AND HAD CANCELLED ALL APPOINTMENTS FOR NEXT DAY IN ORDER HAVE MEDICAL CHECK. HE SAID GOVERNMENT TODAY WAS WEAKER
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PAGE 02 BEIRUT 03533 01 OF 02 261526Z

THAN IT HAD BEEN A YEAR AGO AND FOUND ITSELF BLOCKED AT EVERY TURN. IT NEEDED SHOW POSITIVE EVIDENCE OF ITS PRESENCE AND THAT IT WAS ACCOMPLISHING SOMETHING, OR AT LEAST HAD PROMISE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT TO WHICH LEBANESE CITIZENS COULD LOOK FORWARD. HE SAID FACT WAS THEY HAD BEEN ABLE TO ACCOMPLISH VERY LITTLE. (ALTHOUGH HOSS WAS VERY CAREFUL IN HIS CHOICE OF WORDS, IMPLICIT IN THEM WAS CRITICISM OF SARKIS FOR NOT ACT-

ING MORE DRAMATICALLY.)

3. ECONOMY. I COMMENTED THAT WHILE POLITICAL PROGRESS WAS STALEMATED THERE SEEMED TO BE A GOOD DEAL OF ECONOMIC ACTIVITY AND I GATHERED THERE WAS PLENTY OF MONEY AVAILABLE. HOSS SAID PEOPLE HAD GROWN ACCUSTOMED TO STRESS AND WERE CONTINUING TO LIVE AND OPERATE IN SPITE OF IT. ECONOMIC ACTIVITY, HOWEVER, WAS SUPERFICIAL. NOBODY WAS INVESTING MONEY IN ANYTHING SUBSTANTIAL AND CONSTRUCTION IN PARTICULAR HAD BEEN HARD HIT BY CLOSURE OF CEMENT PLANTS. I ASKED HIM WHEN THEY WOULD OPEN AGAIN AND HE SAID THEY HAD TRIED THREE DAYS EARLIER BUT PHLANGE HAD WARNED WORKERS NOT TO GO BACK. I ASKED IF WORKERS WERE ALL MEMBERS OF PHALANGE AND HE SAID, NO, BUT THEY WERE TIRED OF INTIMIDATION AND STRONG-ARM TECHNIQUES OF FRANGIEHS AND HAD TURNED TO PHALANGE FOR PROTECTION. ONE BRIGHT PIECE OF NEWS ON THE ECONOMIC SIDE WAS THAT COST OF FOOD COMMODITIES, ASIDE FROM USUAL SEASONAL VARIATIONS, WAS REMAINING PRETTY STEADY. IN FACT THE LAST WEEK'S PRICE INDEX OF FIFTY COMMODITIES WAS LOWER BY SEVERAL POINTS THAN IT HAD BEEN WHEN MINISTRY BEGAN KEEPING INDEX FIRST WEEK OF MAY 1977. (THE POUND EXCHANGE RATE IS UP.)

4. ARMY AND THE SOUTH. I SUMMARIZED MY CONVERSATIONS WITH BOUTROS AND SARKIS ON SUBJECT OF SENDING ARMY TO SOUTH AND SAID THAT INSPITE OF ASSURANCES I HAD RECEIVED FROM THEM THERE WERE MANY PEOPLE WHO MAINTAINED THAT THE ARMY WOULD NOT MOVE
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PAGE 03 BEIRUT 03533 01 OF 02 261526Z

TO THE SOUTH BECAUSE OF THE MASSACRE AT EHDEN, IF FOR NO OTHER REASON. HOSS SAID HE DID NOT THINK THE AFTERMATH OF EHDEN WOULD AFFECT MATERIALLY ABILITY TO SEND TROOPS SOUTH. THE UNITS WHICH HAD BEEN ASSEMBLED TO GO SOUTH WERE IN ANY EVENT NOT SUITABLE FOR DEPLOYMENT IN THE NORTH. (PRESUMABLY BECAUSE THEY HAVE TOO MANY MOSLEMS IN THEIR RANKS.) THEY WOULD GO SOUTH BUT NOT UNTIL THE CHRISTIAN MILITIA HAD BEEN BROUGHT UNDER CONTROL AND NOT UNTIL DECISION HAD BEEN TAKEN ABOUT HADDAD. TO SEND ARMY TO SOUTH AND LEAVE HADDAD THERE WOULD IMPLY COOPERATION WITH HIM WHICH WOULD BE UNACCEPTABLE TO ONE PART OF LEBANON.

5. HOSS NOTED THAT ARMY WAS AT THIS POINT ALREADY UNACCEPTABLE TO PEOPLE OF WEST BEIRUT, WHO FELT IT WAS DOMINATED BY MARONITES. SOMETHING WOULD HAVE TO BE DONE TO CONVINCE MOSLEMS THAT THEY WERE GETTING A FAIR DEAL. GENERAL KHOURY WAS A WONDERFUL PERSON AND HE COULD SHOW REAL PROGRESS OVER THE PAST YEAR IN TERMS OF THE NUMBER OF MOSLEMS AT YARZE. IT WAS STILL NOT ENOUGH. HE COULD OFFER THIRTY PER CENT WHEREAS THE MOSLEMS THOUGHT IT SHOULD BE SEVENTY PER CENT. IT WOULD REQUIRE BOTH DETERMINED ACTION AND A MORE ACTIVE CAMPAIGN OF INFORMATION TO OVERCOME PRESENT MOSLEM DISTRUST. FOR THE

ARMY TO BE SEEN TO BE COOPERATING WITH HADDAD WOULD SIMPLY
COMPOUND THE SUSPICIONS WHICH WERE ALREADY TOO STRONG.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BEIRUT 3533

EXDIS

6. I ASKED ABOUT PRESENT REPORTS OF A JOINT LEBANESE SYRIAN
SECURITY PLAN. HOSS SAID THE PLAN CONSISTED SIMPLY OF ASSIGN-
ING AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY IN NORTHERN LEBANON AND IMPROVED
COORDINATION BETWEEN SYRIANS AND LEBANESE UNITS. SYRIAN UNITS
HAD EARLIER BEEN REMOVED FROM COASTAL HIGHWAY AREA BETWEEN
BEIRUT AND TRIPOLI. UNDER NEW PLAN THEY WOULD ASSUME RESPON-
SIBILITY AS FAR SOUTH AS BATRUN. CHRISTIAN UNITS WOULD ALSO
ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY FOR CONTROL POINTS IN CERTAIN OTHER
AREAS SUCH AS DHOUR AS-SHWAYR. THEIR TASK WOULD BE TO PRE-
VENT THE MOVEMENT OF ANY LARGE NUMBERS OF MEN BY FRANGIEH OR
PHALANGE OR ANYONE ELSE. IF SUCH MOVEMENTS OCCURRED THEY
(GOL AND ADF) WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO DISCLAIM RESPONSIBILITY.

7. POLITICAL COOPERATION. I NOTED THAT HOSS HAD SAID GOV-
ERNMENT WAS BLOCKED AT EVERY TURN. WHAT WAS IT THEY WANTED
TO DO BUT COULD NOT? HOSS SAID THERE WERE MANY THINGS WHICH
WERE STYMIED. ONE WAS THE HADDAD QUESTION. ANOTHER WAS THE
CONFESSIONAL BALANCE IN THE ARMY. THE ARMY WAS THE BIGGEST
SINGLE PROBLEM, BUT IN JUST ABOUT EVERY OTHER AREA THE GOVERN-
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PAGE 02 BEIRUT 03533 02 OF 02 261544Z

MENT FOUND ITSELF UNABLE TO MOVE BECAUSE OF SECTARIAN OR POLITICAL REVALRIES. IN THE FIELD OF INFORMATION, FOR INSTANCE, THEY WERE POWERLESS TO SHUT DOWN ILLEGAL RADIO STATIONS RUN BY MURABITOUN AND PHALANGE WHICH SPECIALIZED IN ENVENOMING THE ATMOSPHERE. HE EXCUSED HIMSELF FOR SPEAKING SO FRANKLY WITH- IN THE FOUR WALLS OF THE ROOM IN WHICH WE FOUND OURSELVES, BUT HE WAS SPEAKING AS A FRIEND AND UNBURDENING HIMSELF. THE GOVERNMENT WAS GOING NOWHERE AND HE WAS VERY DISCOURAGED.

8. I TOLD HIM, AS I HAD TOLD SARKIS AND BOUTROS, THAT SECRE- TARY IS FOLLOWING SITUATION IN LEBANON CLOSELY AND WE WERE ANXIOUS TO HELP. OFFHAND, HOWEVER, I DID NOT SEE ANY AREA IN WHICH WE COULD BE OF HELP EXCEPT POSSIBLE WITH REGARD TO SOUTH LEBANON , WHERE WE WOULD RESUME OUR EFFORTS. OUR ECO- NOMIC AID WAS PRIMARILY A PSYCHOLOGICAL HELP AND COULD NOT BY ITS NATURE AFFECT SUBSTANTIALLY THE LEBANESE ECONOMY. WE WERE ALSO AIDING THE ARMY, OF COURSE, BUT DID NOT WANT TO FIND OURSELVES IN THE POSITION OF SUPPORTING A FACTIONAL ARMY WHICH REPRESENTED ONLY ONE SECTOR OF LEBANON. HOSS SAID THAT WAS CERTAINLY ITS CHARACTER IN THE EYES OF THE MOSLEMS.

9. COMMENT. HOSS IS NEVER IN THE MANIC PHASE BUT I HAVE NOT SEEN HIM SO DEPRESSED SINCE THE NIGHT LAST MARCH WHEN HE CAME TO SEE ME AT MY HOME ABOUT THE REFUGEE SITUATION. HIS REMARKS ABOUT THE ARMY, COMING FROM A MODERATE AND SENSIBLE SUNNI LEADER, INDICATE THAT UNLESS MORE VIGOROUS ACTION IS TAKEN TO ASSOCIATE THE MOSLEMS WITH THE ARMY, IT WILL NOT BE ABLE TO FUNCTION IN MOSLEM AREAS. THIS IS A MATTER WE WILL HAVE TO LOOK AT VERY CLOSELY IN CONNECTION WITH OUR FMS PRO- GRAM.

10. HOSS' REMARKS ABOUT THE TROOPS NOT GOING SOUTH UNTIL THE HADDAD ISSUE IS SETTLED IS CONTRARY TO WHAT BOUTROS AND SARKIS
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PAGE 03 BEIRUT 03533 02 OF 02 261544Z

HAVE BEEN SAYING. HE SAID THAT IT WOULD PLACE HIM IN AN IM- POSSIBLE POSITION IF THE ARMY MOVED IN WITH HADDAD STILL THERE AND I SUSPECT THAT IF THIS ISSUE IS NOT RESOLVED THE ARMY WILL NOT GO SOUTH. THE SYRIANS, FOR ONE, WILL NOT COOPERATE. HOSS SAID THAT HADDAD SHOULD BE BROUGHT BACK AND TREATED LIKE A NUMBER OF OTHER OFFICERS WHO FOUGHT FOR ONE SIDE OR ANOTHER DURING THE CIVIL WAR, BY WHICH I BELIEVE HE MEANS PUTTING THEM OUT TO PASTURE.
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